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# Glimpse Into the Future: Using the Curriculum Process System for Collection Development

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## Abstract

One common problem facing academic libraries is the art of materials selection that ensures users have what they need when they need it, or at least the majority of the time. Methods frequently used are librarian selectors, faculty selectors, approval plans, and demand-driven acquisitions. Having close relationships with teaching faculty is pertinent when acquiring monographs to support the courses currently offered as well as those upcoming. However, when that relationship is not strong, libraries must find other methods to gather that valuable insight. This paper will cover how East Tennessee State University's library uses the curriculum process system to inform collection development to support future curriculum needs.

## Introduction

One of the most significant obstacles to overcome in collection development for an academic library is keeping up with the ongoing curriculum changes across the university and developing the collection to support these continuing changes. To achieve efficiency with this type of collection building, receiving up-to-date knowledge of changing instructional needs for current courses, new programs, and new courses is very important. However, librarians tasked with curriculum-based collection development often face challenges in gathering feedback from teaching faculty on what resources are needed to meet their needs and the needs of their students. When the relationship between the library and the academic departments is weak, it complicates the collecting of information needed to develop the collection adequately. In 2017 when I took over acquisitions, the amount of faculty input for collections received by the library was minimal. After a few months of learning the position, I became determined to find a way to anticipate the needs of our students and faculty better. I decided to take a more proactive approach to curriculum-based collection development to obtain the critical data needed to inform collection decisions at East Tennessee State University.

## Collaborative Relationship

An ideal situation in curriculum based-collection development is a collaborative relationship with teaching faculty for collection development. Unfortunately, currently, Sherrod Library does not have an active liaison program in place. In the past, a library coordinator role existed in each academic

department. The responsibility of this role was to gather feedback from all other faculty within the department and submit department needs to the acquisitions librarian. However, that role had disappeared in all but one department on campus before my work in the acquisitions department.

Currently, the primary source of collection involvement from the teaching faculty is through the library's "Suggest a Purchase" form. Ten faculty members do actively submit recommendations to the library relevant to their curriculum. However, ETSU has 799 full-time faculty members. That means we only hear from around 1% of the faculty population. It was immediately apparent upon taking over acquisitions that this just was not enough input to guide the development of the monograph collection. Since we are currently not receiving faculty input and do not have a liaison program, that leaves me, the one acquisitions librarian, responsible for the monograph collection development for the 150-plus academic programs at the university. As it is not possible to be a subject expert in all of these fields, I was left feeling overwhelmed and determined to find a better way forward. Ideally, a system of collaboration between the library and teaching faculty needs to be rebuilt, but in the meantime, the collection must continue to be skillfully developed. My goal is for Sherrod Library to be viewed as a responsive library and for faculty to recognize that we care about their input and are working to ensure the best possible resources are purchased.

## Curriculum Processing System

In hopes of regaining a connection to the university curriculum, I sought to evaluate the potential

use of university systems already in place. The first place I thought to look was course syllabi; however, while many universities manage a repository of publicly available syllabi, ETSU is unfortunately not one of them. Reaching out to each faculty member to request syllabi would be a long, labor-intensive project. I am uncertain if the effort would be worth the response rate I would receive. Therefore I had to look for other sources of course information. The curriculum processing system is an example of the perfect existing system that we can use for curriculum-based collection development. At East Tennessee State University, the library is listed as a review step for all new courses, course modifications, and new programs submitted by university faculty. However, previously this information for the course proposals was not being used to its full potential. Instead, the library's role was primarily to tell faculty about the "Suggest a Purchase" form that they could use to request material for their new course.

Curriculum proposals are a wealth of knowledge for collection development, though. The information included in the proposals can be helpful in the selection of appropriate books, media, and journals to best support student research and instruction preparation. For each proposal, the potential data includes materials recommended by the faculty member for student reference, resources used in the creation of the course, the topics to be covered in the class, what the students are expected to know after completion, and the types of assignments that will be part of the course. Each bibliography section is reviewed to identify material recommended that the library does not currently own. Monographs and physical media not owned are purchased, and an e-mail is sent to the faculty member upon receipt to notify them that the item is now available in the library. Journals and databases not owned are added to the library's recommended item spreadsheet. The resources are then evaluated and considered as part of the library's annual budget request. Interestingly, although the instructions state resources needed to support the course can be submitted to the library for purchase, the majority of faculty are not making any requests. Nevertheless, I continue to find resources being recommended in the bibliography for courses that are not owned by the library.

The course topics are reviewed as well to determine if the library has adequate material in the subject area. It is essential that we have enough resources to support student research in the appropriate subjects adequately. When gaps are identified, I work

to identify material to improve or update the library offerings. In specialized areas, it is sometimes necessary to reach out directly to the faculty originator to seek recommendations for content on the topics covered in the course. The course format is taken into account as well. While reviewing online-only courses, the evaluation and purchases will focus primarily on electronic books and streaming media. The type of assignments for the course is also considered as particular types of material will be required for different kinds of courses; for example, a lab course versus a research-intensive course.

Since beginning this process in 2017, I have begun to use the curriculum process as a way to inform faculty of library materials they did not list in the bibliography that may be of interest, especially new ones. It has also been a great place to promote subject guides to faculty. Beyond collection development, I am hoping to use the system as a form of communication about the library's resources for courses as a way to reconnect with the teaching faculty. This will allow me to reassure the teaching faculty that the library is interested in what they do and is being proactive in developing a collection that will meet the needs of their students. The primary outcome that I hope to achieve is to gain the trust and respect of the faculty members to shape a future where they see the librarians as professional peers. As this relationship builds, hopefully, rather than the library reaching out to them for collection guidance, they will start reaching out to the library with recommendations and openly communicate department needs.

## Benefits

Currently, this strategy for collection development has been utilized for the past two years. So far, the statistics are saying it is a successful strategy. One hundred percent of the books purchased based on information from new course syllabi have circulated at least one time, with 20% circulating at least three times. The success can also be seen in the number of departments the library purchased monographs for since beginning this strategy. The year before I was employed in the acquisitions department, the library purchased materials for 14 departments. In the first year of my work in acquisitions and the first year of this collection development strategy, the library purchased materials for 26 departments and the second year 29 departments. With this strategy, departments that do not have a proactive faculty member now have a voice in shaping the library's collection.

There have been many benefits to this program so far. Of course, the most significant benefit is that the majority of the books purchased are being recommended to students by the faculty members in the course syllabus. Furthermore, as just mentioned, they are all being used. While reviewing the proposals can be time-consuming, ultimately, I am saving time in the selection process compared to my previous workflow. Faculty are also gaining trust in the library to meet their instructional needs and gaining knowledge of resources that are already available in the collection that they may not have been aware of.

## Challenges

However, the implementation of this strategy has had its challenges as well. I am in charge of monograph collection development for all 46 departments at the university. Faculty expect a quick turnaround time on the library's review of their proposal, yet this process is time-consuming, and each year I process around 150 proposals. The work-around I have created to meet the demands of a quick yet detailed review is to complete the initial review in which I review the bibliography and purchase the material listed. I then have a spreadsheet where I document all of the remaining data that I need for collection development and approve the course. I am then able to work on the more in-depth collection development aspects on my timeframe. Getting faculty involved more in selecting titles to fill gaps in their areas of expertise has also proved to be a challenge. However, moving forward, I believe that this

will continue to improve the more proactive I am in reaching out and communicating purchase decisions based on course reviews.

## Conclusion

The library must identify and support the needs of our faculty and students, both current and future. I anticipate that using the curriculum development process to connect with faculty will allow us to support the academic departments as they continue to develop new courses within their disciplines. Instead of assuming library resources are effectively supporting faculty and students because we are not hearing from them, this methodology allows me to systematically evaluate course offerings to ensure the resources are available for our patrons when they need them. Before this strategy, we were not taking full advantage of the data we were being provided in our workflow. While this form of collection development does not reduce costs, it does better align monograph expenditures with current curriculum needs. As the relationship is rebuilt, I am hopeful of gaining access to more current course syllabi to evaluate and use for collection development purposes. This will allow me to address the current and forthcoming needs of the university as I strive to develop a user-centered collection. Essentially, my ultimate goal is to establish academic partnerships with faculty and reestablish the library as a curriculum partner so that the library and the departments can work together to support the students and fulfill the mission of the university.